References

What is a reference?

A reference is a *person* that you know and should know you.

There are two categories of references:

1. **Personal:**
   Someone that will vouch for your character and personality, but not your work abilities.
   This person will not be a relative or a spouse or even a friend.
   They might be a previous client, boss, peer, or someone that reported to you.

   As a rule, employers don't ask for personal references. And though you may be tempted to use a personal reference as a professional reference, this is generally not advised. However, if you have limited work experience or are branching into a new field, this might be necessary.

2. **Professional:**
   Someone that has worked with you and can attest to your skillset, work ethic, leadership, teamwork, and attitude.
   They might be a previous client, boss, peer, or someone that reported to you.

How does it work?

When you apply for a job you can expect to supply references. Oftentimes there is an area on the

actual application where you will list the names and contact information. Sometimes, *when interviewing is in person again*, you might be asked for a list. It is not uncommon to have your reference list typed up and ready to had over.

- The common number requested is **three,** but might be as many as five.
- Prior to including a reference's contact information on your application, you should mentally choose three individuals that you think would speak highly of you and your work—for that particular job. Consider the position you are applying for and then who might best speak to your strengths with positive insights.
- Contact your reference **first, and ask for permission** for your future employer to contact them.
  - Provide them an opportunity to decline
  - Tell them when and how they might be contacted
  - Share the job position and your goals—consider sharing a copy of your resume/portfolio
  - Give specifics of what you might like them to say and kindly remind them of a specific professional achievement
- Follow up afterward and thank them for their time, regardless of landing the job *or not*.

Your future employer will contact these references prior to you starting the job. Generally, this is one of the *last* steps before you begin working after you have interviewed. Depending on the size of the company the call might come from the Human Resources Department (HR) or the hiring manager. NOTE: there will most likely be a standard set of questions asked, but it helps to prepare your reference with information about the job and remind them of your strengths.

Tips

- It is no longer best practice to add "References available upon request."
- You should always ask first—consider how awkward it would be to receive a phone call from a stranger asking you about someone that you haven't thought about in years! That "reference check" phone call or email might not go very well if you don't get permission and prepare them for the call.
- Check-in with your reference each time you plan to use them for a job. Then, check-in with them *after* to see how it went, and decide if you want to use them again!
- The most recent the reference the better. However, it's okay to pull out a previous colleague from years ago if that is all you have!

- References from volunteer work or internships are applicable.

Resources

LinkedIn, Feb 2020 | **Use References as Your Job Search Closers (https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/use-references-your-job-search-closers-andrew-seaman)**

FlexJobs, Oct 2020 | **How to Choose Professional References for a Job (https://www.flexjobs.com/blog/post/professional-job-references)**

The Balance Careers, Nov 2020 | **How to Format a List of Professional References (https://www.thebalancecareers.com/how-to-format-a-list-of-professional-references-2062923)**

Fast Company, Feb 2015 | **The Do's and Don'ts of Job References (https://www.fastcompany.com/3042723/the-dos-and-donts-of-job-references)**